

3.22 Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitments of Resources That Would Be Involved in the Proposed Action

3.22.1 Build Alternative (Two-Lane Express Lanes Connector) (Preferred Alternative)

The construction of the Build Alternative would involve a commitment of a range of natural, physical, human, and fiscal resources. Land used in the construction of the Build Alternative would be considered to result in an irreversible commitment of that land during the time period the land is used for the highway facilities. However, if a greater need arises for use of the land or if the highway facilities are no longer needed in the future, that land could be converted to another use. At present, there is no reason to expect that such a conversion would ever be necessary or desirable. It should also be noted that only a very small area (5 ac) of the Build Alternative occurs outside of Caltrans right-of-way, which eliminates a large range of alternative land uses for the project site.

Construction of the Build Alternative would require a permanent maintenance easement on a vacant county-owned parcel within the Irvine Ranch National Natural Land Mark (NNL). The parcel is on the slope approximately 3,600 feet (ft) west of Coal Canyon Undercrossing. Construction of the permanent maintenance easement would need to grade into this slope in order to accommodate the widening of SR-91 to the south. However, the area proposed for grading would be restored and revegetated upon completion of construction. Additionally, the Build Alternative would result in the construction of four retaining walls within the existing Caltrans right-of-way. One wall would be constructed in the median of SR-241; two mechanically stabilized earth retaining walls would be constructed in the median of SR-91; and the remaining wall would be constructed adjacent to eastbound SR-91. Construction of the proposed retaining walls would not require grading activity.

The Build Alternative would result in an irreversible commitment of biological resource habitat areas to transportation uses. The Proposed Project would result in direct permanent effects to coastal sage scrub, which is a habitat of special concern within the Biological Study Area (BSA) for the Proposed Project, while fairly small, direct and indirect effects to coastal California gnatcatcher and designated critical habitat are expected to occur as a result of project implementation. Incidental take would be permitted for impacts on habitat supporting up to three pairs of California gnatcatcher.

Considerable amounts of fossil fuels, labor, and construction materials (e.g., cement, aggregate, and bituminous material) would be expended for construction of the Build Alternative, and these resources would not be retrievable. Additionally, large amounts of labor and natural resources would be used in the production of construction materials that are generally non-retrievable as well. However, the use of labor and natural resources required for the Proposed Project would not have an adverse effect on the continued availability of these resources in Southern California. Construction of the Build Alternative would also require expenditures of anticipated funds from local, State, and federal sources. Those funds are not retrievable. However, savings in travel time and improved transportation system efficiency would offset this use of materials, labor, resources, and funds. In addition to the costs of construction, there would be increased ongoing costs for facility maintenance, including pavement, roadside litter/sweeping, signs and markers, electrical, and storm water control.

The commitment of these resources to the Build Alternative is based on the concept that residents, workers, travelers, and others in the immediate area and region, would benefit from the improved quality of the regional transportation system that connects the Counties of Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino. These benefits would consist of improved accessibility, travel time, and safety, and a potentially reduced demand for fossil fuels to operate vehicles on the corridor between SR-241 and SR-91. These benefits of the Build Alternative are expected to offset the commitment of these resources to this Proposed Project.

3.22.2 No Build Alternative

The No Build Alternative would not result in any irretrievable commitment of resources because the No Build Alternative would not result in the construction of improvements associated with the SR-241/SR-91 Express Lane Connectors. The No Build Alternative would not provide any reduction in travel times or efficiency and, therefore, would not provide benefits related to reduced demand for fossil fuels to operate cars, buses, and trucks as a result of improved efficiency at the connection point between SR-241 and SR-91.